THE MEDIATOR

C. JINARAJADASA

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C. JINARAJADASA

THE MEDIATOR

And Other Theosophical Essays

By C. JINARAJADASA

Vice President of the Theosophical Society

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Chapter I

THE MEDIATOR

In man's attempt to state the nature of the substratum of the universe, it has been common in the past to describe the One Life as a Person. This Personality of God is often imaged as having one attribute of man's physical nature, which is breathing. In the Hindu tradition, the word Atman is from a root meaning "to breathe," and a verse in the Rig Veda describes the One as breathing. Turning westwards, the phrase "Spirit of God" is constant in Judaism and Christianity, the word "spirit" coming from a Latin root signifying breathing. A well-known Christian hymn begins:

> Breathe on me, Breath of God,
> Fill me with life anew,
> That I may love what Thou dost love,
> And do what Thou dost do.

What underlies this idea of a Breath in the universe? It is a great truth difficult to express, and yet one which everyone discovers sooner or later, in one of the myriad forms of its revelation. Not only is the universe alive, as if it were an entity, but its life

pulsates in a kind of systole and diastole, as if the universe breathed out and breathed in.

Discarding, however, these anthropomorphic similes, and adopting one more in accord with our modern mentality, the great truth may be stated in a different way, that the universe contains two streams of energy, an outward or downward stream and an inward or upward stream. These two streams are coequal, as in electricity the positive and negative are coequal. And just as each speck of matter is made of positive and negative electricity, so each speck of life, whether in mineral, plant, animal or man, is the meeting place of the descending and ascending streams.

We all note the descending stream of life everywhere. In the growing plant, a life issues forth, and we call its expanding attribute "life." But more hidden from our eyes is the fact that the plant is also a canal or tube through which another wave of life, which has already manifested itself, is returning to the source whence it came. I love my friend, and he is for the time the mirror of divine of things to me, and I see the glory of the Descending God in his face. But my friend is also a shrine, to receive that something which I have to give to the One Life whence he and I have issued. In his face, if I know how to look, I shall see also the Ascending God.

It is one of the wonders of life that the Descending God, on His ascent again, desires to take back

what manifestation has to give. We are apt to think the Transcendence as so perfect as to need nothing from the Immanence. Yet surely the universe would not have come forth from the Unmanifested except that, after manifestation is over, the Unmanifested is in some mysterious way more perfect. It is contrary to philosophic tradition to speculate whether or not Brahman the Absolute has more of Sat, Chit and Ananda after manifestation is complete. Be that as it may, the mystics know this truth, that the Ascending God takes with Him what the universe has to give.

It is this fact of the going forth and of the return of the Life-streams which is the basis of that much misunderstood doctrine of the Atonement. In its crude presentation, the Atonement is the substitution of an "escape-goat" or scapegoat, on whom is placed the sins of the culprit; a deity who must be appeased accepts the goat as a substitute for the cuprit. But the real truth underlying the Atonement of the Christ, "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven," and "was made flesh," is that He atones mankind with God in a way that none but a Christ can. That great soul who becomes a Christ is the high priest of humanity, because the Life-streams, which go forth through all souls, return to their source not only through them, but also in some mysterious way through Him. A Christ is a Mediator, being duel in His nature, both man and God. As having attained

perfection, He is God; as the fruit of an evolutionary process and as still of it, He is man. So a Christ becomes mankind's priest, praying at mankind's altar, and offering to God on behalf of the people. Yet at the same time He is the channel through which the Divine Blessing reaches the people. Therefore it is graphically said in the Christian ritual, when the congregation adores the God manifest in the Sacrament, and gives Him their worship,

> Wherefore, O Lord and Heavenly Father, we Thy humble servants do offer unto Thee this, the most precious gift which Thou hast bestowed upon us, in token of our love and of the perfect devotion and sacrifice of our minds and hearts to Thee; and we pray that Thou wouldst command Thy Holy Angel to bear our oblation to Thine Altar on high, there to be offered by Him Who, as the eternal High Priest, forever offers Himself as the eternal Sacrifice.

But how comes it that one alone, a Christ—a Buddha-to-be, that rare Blossom on our tree of humanity —can stand so midway between man and God, as a mediator through whom the Life-streams descend and ascend to and from all men? It is because He so trains His nature. Life after life, as He lives from age to age, He makes Himself one with each descending stream through His sympathy, understanding and sacrifice. He is one with the sinner and undergoes

with him the struggle of temptation; He sins with the sinner, and yet understands the sin and pities the sinner; He suffers with the sinner as the debt of pain is being paid, and yet strengthens the will to repentance. Every type of human life He becomes one with; king and subject, master and servant, hand-worker and brain-worker, husband and wife, parent and child, doubter and teacher, these He becomes life after life, till not a single human cry for light, not a single thrill of joy which happens in the world but finds instantaneous response in Him. More wonderful still, every stream of life of animal, plant and mineral becomes twined into His life, till of a verity He is the Vine and we are the branches. The high angels too become part of Him and their needs become His needs.

> Never a sigh of passion or of pity,
> Never a wail for weakness or for wrong
> Has not its archives in the angels' city,
> Finds not its echo in the endless song.

So having become one with all that lives, the returning streams in the creatures of the world flow back to their source through Him also. And as they so return, He sings the pæan of praise which they dumbly feel but cannot utter. He offers to the One Life the joy of sacrifice which wells up in such men as look upwards to the Light and pledge themselves to serve it.

This wonder of the Atonement is in some measure the privilege of every soul. Every man and woman can become that wonderful mystery, the gateway of life through which the Godhead descends and ascends. We prepare our natures for His descent as we aspire for purity, for light, for lifting a little the heavy karma of the world. But we prepare for His ascent by a special orientation of our heart and mind, first to all life's joys and then to all its sorrows. Each joy comes to us not to be made our own, but to receive from us the touch of our spirit as it wends its way to the source of all joy. Does my friend draw love out of me and transform my life? Let me be thankful that the Godhead so descends through him to me to give me joy. But with my gratitude I must send by the returning stream in my beloved something from me which the Godhead can build into His everlasting life. Does my friend love me? Then I must not keep his love as my own, but send it through me, up and up, with those returning streams which flow through me. Is one grateful to me? In truth, it is not to me he is grateful, but to the descending Godhead who worked through me a deed which released gratitude. Do they bend the knee to me as a savior? Then I must pass their worship on, up and up, to the One Life whence issued the message of salvation. The flower, the hill, the mountain range, the sea, these inspire me with their beauty or their grandeur. But through the

flower, the hill, the mountain range, the sea, I must send, with the returning streams in them, my praise and worship of Nature, to add one tiny ray to the glory which surrounds the One.

My griefs, too, harbor both the descending and ascending streams. When I suffer, I see only the sad karma which the descending stream brings to me on its tide. What of the ascending stream, where is it in my pain? In the karma itself, for no karma is blind or purposeless. The universe suffers with my suffering; but the Cosmic Will in the universe has determined to transform all life to joy, in spite of pain. There must ascend from me a gratitude to the Justice which teaches me that Law is all in all, to the Compassion which tries to grow on my dark soil of pain the white flowers of virtue and strength.

So slowly every man becomes a Mediator, till life after life his circle grows and, on the threshold of Nirvana, he holds within his circumference all that lives.

THE BRIDGE-BUILDER

Chapter II

THE BRIDGE-BUILDER

There is scarcely a child who has not looked at clouds and seen them arranging themselves as terraces and parks, as hills and fortresses. Sometimes the clouds take the shape of huge animals, sometimes of monstrous faces. When our imagination works in this fashion, all clouds are suggestive of some solid shape. Such imagination is not mere childishness; the perspective in the clouds does vividly recall to us objects which we have seen. This suggestiveness in clouds has been experienced by most of us as children.

Obviously some imaginative faculty is required in a child to see a mass of mist as a solid, living thing. But the amount of imagination is not very great. Still, whatever the amount of it we possess as children, usually we lose much, if not all, of it, later. If, however, as we grow up, our education is not all a matter of suppressing us and of pasting labels on us, but has opened up to us here and there glimpses of a world which is not purely material, then our imagination revives, and once more material objects begin to take on a symbolic character. Indeed it may be truly said that the more highly educated a man is the more

symbolically he sees life. Life for the cultured man is always suggestive. But of what?

There is a wood nearby as I write, and every day I pass through it. But there are some days when the air is still and every tree is as a sentinel. As I look, there comes a change over my mind, and suddenly it is as if the trees, the light playing about them, the sky seen through them, all become as a window through which I look into something. Landscapes have always this effect upon me; my mind is held still, so that the thinking faculty is tense, yet not thinking. I want to think, but do not know what to think, because what is presented before my mind cannot be clearly stated in terms of thought. What is it that I look into through that window which is the landscape?

Quite a different effect is produced on many people by the sea. To Byron, who was a typically sea soul, the sea—not placid, but with great rollers—was as a Mighty Mother who tenderly soothed his nature and caressed him. To many, especially in northern lands, the sea is as a Face, the vision of which brings a regeneration into purity and strength. There is nothing to them so heartening as to be on the seashore, the angry waves before them, the storm wind nearly tearing them apart; all that fury is for them a great balm.

Different from these are the mountain souls. At

the first glimpse of the hills, it is as if a great pall which had pressed down on life were removed. They begin to breathe without suffocation, and as if to hear voices that tell of limitless strength and the peace of the ages. The storm and stress of life which surrounded them in the plains become oriented in a new way among mountains, so as to make life more bearable. There is more life for them with which to live, because the mountains give it.

Seas, landscapes and mountains can become windows to look into another world. Their lovers cannot necessarily describe that other world, except in terms of this. But if they know one thing precisely, it is that that world is *not* this. Their great discovery lies in just that distinction; to them the fulfilment of life is to escape from this world into that yonder. Not that this world of daily duties is not real; but its reality is derived, not intrinsic. It becomes largely symbolic. But once again, symbolic of what?

It is to that mysterious other world that life steadily constrains us. We are not led to it gently, or enticed into it with blandishments. With most of us, life bruises us again and again, till we open our eyes to that other world. Certainly there are many of the earth earthy who refuse to raise their eyes from the sense world to a supersensuous world. But they are as callouses on life's integument, and life's subtle energies curve round them and leave them to their materi-

ality. Forgetting these as life's temporary failures, we find that most men change from childhood to old age, not merely bodily, but also in their response to their unseen environment. That change consists in the main of seeing or sensing another world through this world.

Of course deeply religious people readily weave heaven's colors round earth's shadows. But the theological heaven is not the only aspect of the world yonder. When a poet looks at a nautilus shell and sees there stately mansions for the soul, he looks through the shell into a world of greater reality. The poet's world has a quality of reality compared with which cataracts and mountain ranges are made of mere dreams. All the arts are a statement to us of the world yonder, in terms of our world. There is no need to label that other world; labels convey nothing to him who has not yet discovered it. Heaven, the Noumenal World, Avyaktam, the Beautiful, these and others are labels we use; but the reality conveyed by them exists only for him who has found it by direct experience.

Perhaps that art among the arts which leads to the highest levels of symbolism is music. There is no window like that of music through which to gaze at that world yonder. It is a world which baffles statement. A musical phrase hints at it; a symphony gives a message concerning it. But we misname it, if we

use our musical terms for its nature. A sorrowful phrase in music, while synthesizing all men's sorrows, tells us of something for which our label is sorrow, which in its intrinsic nature is not sorrow at all; what it is the faculties of man cannot grasp. Napoleon's death may have been the stimulus to Beethoven to create the funeral march in the Eroica Symphony, but the march does not tell us of the death of any hero, nor of any form of death either. It tells us of a world totally other than our world, of which we contact just one fragment by a tentacle of ours which we call "grief." So with every mood of heart and mind which is depicted in music. Music does not state *our moods*, not even in their sublimated forms. Music describes its own world, and our moods with their human labels are but the bridges to cross to music's world. But a bridge is not the other bank.

So are all our experiences. They are only bridges from the world of the senses to a supersensuous world. It is the man of many bridges who alone lives to some true purpose. Books, religions, philosophies, sciences and arts—nay more, our very griefs—what are these useful for except to build bridges?

It requires a constant watch over oneself to prevent being so tied to the mere business of living that one forgets the soul's true occupation, which is to build bridges. Time comes when the body wears away, and the senses are blunted, and the business of living

slackens. Then only one activity makes life endurable: it is to cross and recross our bridges, till we become so familiar with the world yonder, that we eagerly await the day when there is no return after crossing. Even long before that day, if we are expert bridge-builders, the nearness and dearness of that other world haunts us night and day, making living away from it a perpetual heartache.

Live we must, in this world of five senses. Yet few know how to live. They cling to the thing, and miss the symbol conveyed by it. The friend, in his body of flesh, of so many pounds avoirdupois, is real to them; the thought of the friend is alone not sufficient. They think they see the friend when looking on his face; they do not know what a wonderful symbol he becomes, when body is replaced by thought, and how the more symbolic he becomes the more of him there is self-revealing.

Throughout all our days, it is this symbolic quality in life that alone is the haven of happiness and peace. For the things of our world are transient, and time's blight covers all things. But if we have seen that other world, then the disappearance of all that makes life "worth living," as men call life, is not a loss but a gain. For slowly that transcendental world becomes ours—that world of eternal and infinite things which can never leave us, because we have become one with them.

Were I the warden of heaven's gate, and souls came to that place of final peace and blessedness, I would ask each soul, "What do you bring?" If the answer were, "I bring the world of the Vedas—or of the Bible—or of the Koran," I would not open. But if the answer were, "I bring *my* world," I would ask one further question, "What is truth in your world?" And if the reply were, "That is *my* mystery," I would open heaven's gate, and say, "Pass, Brother, you have found."

THE ENDING OF DESIRE

Chapter III

THE ENDING OF DESIRE

Sooner or later those who believe in a Providence begin to doubt the reasonableness of the ways of that Providence. Whoever believes in God must necessarily postulate Him as infinitely loving. But when that postulate is tested by the workings of Providence, then distinctly "God's ways are not our ways." Love and mercy are certainly not the most obvious factors in this scheme of things. On the contrary, there is an unpitying determination in the Cosmic Will to achieve its destiny which meets us at every turn. Life very soon makes clear to us that our hopes and desires are not particularly precious in its scheme of things.

It is this ruthless element in life which every philosopher has noted. All are agreed as to its power, and so they all unite in one aim, which is to teach man some way of escape from his misery. Each philosopher states the problem with factors derived from life itself. The Lord Buddha points out the inevitable transitoriness of every thing, and how in that transitoriness lies the root of human misery. "All compo-

nent things change and pass away; they are the cause of misery." And since the fulfilment of every desire, even of the highest aspiration, is dependent on some object or state which is compounded of other objects or states, to hope for happiness anywhere in a component universe is finally to meet disappointment.

So Lord Buddha teaches men to find a way to Something which is not compounded of objects or states—a Nirvana which has no characteristic of what we term "life," since such life as we experience is among compounded things. The Sages of Hinduism tell us that the universe is compounded of a triplicity of Gunas of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Identity with any activity of these Gunas, with their characteristics of Rhythm, Motion and Inertia, inevitably leads to rebirth and the long round of Karma and Dharma. So the soul must stand unmoved by them saying, whatever happens, "The Gunas work among the Gunas." When crushed by pain, he yet must stand unmoved, saying, "The Gunas work among the Gunas." When his hopes and aspirations bring their fruition of joy, then, too, he must stand unmoved and say, "The Gunas work among the Gunas."

Not many experiences are required to convince a man, if he is not wilfully blind to facts, that an element of misery is inseparable from life in every form. It is an old, old experience of mankind that to achieve the heart's desire and to be supremely happy are not

one and the same thing. What we long for will be realized by us, for our longing is a force, and we live in a world of law, and as is the cause so will be the effect. Sometimes our longings are counterbalanced by other forces of ours, so that no result appears. Our longings are then dammed up for the time; but inevitably when the obstruction is gone, in this life or in some other, they bring to us the joys we planned for. But always, when at last come the joys we planned to come, we have in some slight measure grown beyond the need of them. And furthermore, a new longing which we did not have previously has sprung up asking for new joy. So the fulfilment of our heart's desire is not without a shade of sadness.

If no happiness is to be found in life itself, if peace is nowhere among the Gunas, surely then life is utterly rooted in misery. Yet the mind cannot accept such a conclusion, unless with the proviso that there is somewhere something, a Moksha, a Nirvana, a Peace which is the negation of misery.

The testimony of all who have trodden the Path "narrow as the edge of a razor, hard to tread" is that there is such a Peace "that passeth understanding." While teaching that all component things are the cause of misery, yet the Lord Buddha ever taught that there is a way. If Shiva, the Destroyer, delights to wear a garland of skulls and dwell in the burning-ground, it is to show men that by the very contemplation of

the terror and ruthlessness of life a peace can be found.

Since all evolve from man to God, sooner or later all men will come to that peace. But it can be sooner, rather than later, if we will. The way begins—and here all philosophers are agreed—by "killing out the desire of life." But what value is there to us of any peace, if there is nothing left of us after we have killed in us the desire of living? What value is Nirvana to a mummified soul? Better our little self, even if infinitesimal in extent, and even if suffering is its perennial lot, better life of any kind, than no life whatsoever.

But the great Teachers have never said that we are to seek the ending of *life*, but only to seek the ending of the *desire* of life. To live and to desire to live are distinct things. With the clear recognition of that distinction, the way opens before our feet.

Is it possible to live and yet not desire to live? Surely the very essence of our individuality is that it may feel life pulsating through it? How can life grow from small to great, unless it strives to grow? Difficult though this seems to the understanding, yet we have all experienced the distinction at the times of the high-water mark of our past being.

Our normal life is constantly based on the idea of a self, a self-conscious group of memories, with a precise periphery of its own, which differentiates it from all other peripheries. I may dearly love my friend, but my friend and I are two distinct selves.

With that recognition that my self is distinct from every other self, I usually experience life. Under normal conditions, I feel that it is I who am miserable, or happy, I who long and aspire, I who fail or succeed. It is in a manner the crowning of that self of mine when I touch my high-water mark and love greatly or give myself fully in sacrifice. Such is my normal life.

Yet there are times when, such is the *quality* of the experience, the self seems to vanish with the experiencing. Sometimes the experience is so tender, so lovely, so pure, that the depth of delight which it gives is somehow given not to a self, but only as if to an abstraction. Sometimes it happens that a sunset is so glorious that the beholder is conscious only of its glory, without correlating to it his self which is experiencing the delight of its marvels. A rose or a lotus can be so tender and pure as it lies in our hands that a love or a worship is born to greet it, with no feeling as if a self loved or worshiped.

If only as children we could be taught how to be happy, and yet not to label that delight as "my happiness." If our parents would not teach us to develop a sense of ownership in our toys or our pretty clothes, or our tricks of pleasing, perhaps then as we grew up we should learn how to let life live through us, and yet not label it "my life!" For it is possible to be supremely happy and yet not pollute its purity with

the touch of our hands. Then no shade of sorrow follows a joy. It is the binding of our self to the joy which comes to us that makes the shadow of misery. It is not life which makes for sorrow, but ourselves. When we learn this lesson, then we know by direct experience what it is to live, and yet without a particle of any desire for life.

It is only when we thus "kill out the desire of life" that we are at the commencement of the solution of the great problems. Is there a Divine Purpose, is Love the heart of life, is there a God who cares? These are the problems we are constantly clamoring to solve. Yet the first word of the solution is in ourselves. We hear that word spoken to ourselves and by ourselves, when the desire of life is gone. Then for the first time we see clearly, and with the clear vision comes life's true meaning.

THE CRUCIBLE OF IMMORTALITY

Chapter IV

THE CRUCIBLE OF IMMORTALITY

One of the most spiritual concepts ever recurring in Hinduism is Immortality. The Sanskrit word is Amrita, which has the root *mar,* meaning "death," preceded by the privative vowal *a,* giving the final significance "without death," "immortal." In Greek, the word appears as *ambrotos,* "immortal," whence *ambrosia,* "the food of the Gods." In a Hindu prayer, Amrita or Immortality appears in a striking phrase, "I offer myself in the crucible of Immortality."

But what is Immortality? In general, we think of it as a condition which is the very negation of everything connoted by death. For death is sorrow, it is diminution, it leads to the annihilation of all we prize as life. So as we turn from that blot on life which comes to us as death, we reach out to Immortality. If we were unable to dream of some kind of deathlessness, we would be as mere stocks and stones. Man is no longer man when he loses the faculty of hoping.

To hope with the heart is one thing, but to see with the mind another. When we look closely into life, there is no moment when death is not at the heels of

life, no fragment of life where death is not already enshrined. That is the sad vision before the mind; health and strength and happiness are but the topmost points of curves which by their very nature must descend. Nay, more than this, if each organism grows, it is only because it is constantly changing, that is, dying to the nature which it possessed before the point of departure for the change.

We too are constantly dying; but for a daily change in that "self" of ours to something a little ampler, we should stagnate and decay. Those who cannot change are as if dead; the aura of death is visible round them, to those who look with the eyes of Immortality. The Nation that is anchored in the past and will not move, the custom that will not change, these already show signs of putrescence, though those who compose the Nation or are custodians of custom pride themselves that they are the "quick" and not the dead. It is the very essence of life that it should change from moment to moment. If life were to cease one instant from fulfiling itself by change, it would cease to possess the characteristics of life. So in an inextricable fashion, life and death are inseparable. Or to put the matter in another way, there can be no growth without change.

But is there no changelessness any where? Are all life and being a mere flux? What of the Spirit of God Himself—is not He at the long last One who does not

change? To this, the mind can but answer (whatever the heart may whisper), "If God too were not to change, He would become steadily less, and so cease to remain God." To the mind that sees change everywhere and sees ever death in life, God cannot be utterly different from His universe, He cannot be the negation of the forces which He has instilled into His universe. If God is the Creator of a universe which is a flux, then too there must be change after change in Him. God must be a change in changelessness, if you will; other than this, the mind cannot conceive.

What then of the heart that seeks Permanence? Shall death's shadow stand ever at life's side, even in God's presence? Shall a doubt of an unknown still to come ever pursue us, from heaven to heaven?

Here a most luminous thought was given by the ancient sages of India. They said that man became immortal, not by escaping death, but *by becoming one with death.* This is the theme of many an ancient ritual in Hinduism. In every religion where a Divinity dies—Christ in Christianity, Osiris in ancient Egypt, Attis in Assyria, Dionysus Zagreus in Greece—the same truth is revealed. It is only by voluntarily accepting death, by becoming "one with death," that man transcends death. He dies only to be resurrected, and so to become immortal.

To become one with death—that is the high training to which the heart must be subjected sooner or

later. So sorrow meets us everywhere. We cling to a beloved and he is snatched from us; we toil year after year to bring to our lips the divine drink of happiness, but when finally our lips touch it, its sweetness has somehow gone. To achieve our heart's desire is only to be confronted with another desire which must be achieved later. So from sensation to sensation, from ambition to ambition, from house to house of life, we pass, sorrowful ever that happiness eludes.

But this is only so long as we are not "one with death." The moment we so unite ourselves with death, then we touch that indescribable thing which is Immortality. But for this we must die daily, from moment to moment, not grudgingly nor with fear, but joyously and with glad acceptance. We must voluntarily place ourselves in the midst of the crucible, to suffer untold agonies, to be burnt to cinders, and even to be annihilated. It is not the *kind* of destiny that matters, but to be one with destiny, *whatever it be.* "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," said Job. And in so saying, he touched the fringe of the glory of Immortality.

That is a hard thing, to be one with the destiny which faces us. We say first with Jesus, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me." But only after this first prayer comes our second, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." It is only when we

know how to pray not to be different from our own destiny but to become one with it, that we begin to know what is true deathlessness.

And we find deathlessness along all paths. A Creator and a Savior will help us to be one with death; but so will a philosophy which needs no Creator at all. For Immortality is not a thing to be received as a gift from another, even from God Himself, but something to be discovered in our self, a mold into which we must pour the white-hot metal of that self.

When daily we mold that self of ours, then we see everywhere not death but deathlessness, not life as a process in many selves, but only the life of One Self. So watching, living, we become "one with death," and when death comes to us to take away this body of ours, he finds we had renounced it long ago. Having become one with death, there is no "body" in which any self of ours dwells for death to call his own.

All these wonders and glories are his who cares, even now, to become "one with death." To put on, for even one moment, the robe of Immortality is for him thereafter to hunger and pine for what men ignorantly call death, the end, but which he knows is the true beginning. How may one who has sensed life's true beginning describe it to those who are not yet tired of the heavy weight of their mortality? For such is the Maya which fetters us, that we hug our

chains and think we are free. We think our embodied existence has a meaning, when in truth all it can utter is broken words.

A time comes when the Maya begins slowly to wear away. Then embodied life is only as the tuning up of the instrumentalities of an orchestra—fragments of themes making a chaos of sound. Then a pause, an utter silence as the conductor draws the attention of the orchestra to him. After that moment of silence, the music begins, and there issue from it meaning and reality. So are life—and death.

TRANSMUTATION

Chapter V

TRANSMUTATION

In the migration of words from race to race among the Aryans, the two words "Jîva" from the Sanskrit and "quick" from the English seem far apart and yet are from the same root. In the Biblical phrase "the quick and the dead," the word "quick" has the old significance of living, the meaning which has always been retained by the word "Jîva."

Movement has from the beginning been associated with life. A little study of biological processes shows that this movement is always towards a transmutation. The mysterious force called life which resides in the seed first transforms the substance of the seed, and then by means of roots and shoots transforms the minerals of the earth to living cells with which to build leaf and branch. Every cell, whether of plant or animal or man, transmutes the substance of its environment; the moment such transmutation ceases, death supervenes.

It is not, therefore, curious that we should associate stillness and absence of movement with our highest conception of life? We do not associate activity with our usual conception of happiness; to be happy is

to be free of occupation, to be at rest. Little wonder that heaven in the Christian conception is "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." Heaven signifies to us a place where there is no "work"; it is a place where we are happy, that is, without any work, enjoying but not working.

Perhaps this conception of happiness as static is largely due to the struggle for existence which surrounds us. That struggle is so much a drudgery that "work" means a mechanical routine. Our senses have become so blunted by it, that we can no longer sense the transformation of energy which that routine entails. But every routine, however mechanical, means a transmutation. A routine must always produce life, even if it be life which is already familiar to us, and therefore with no message of newness. Yet as a matter of fact, every day's life, however much the result of a routine, has something new in it. But our senses are quickly deadened, and so we cannot greet each day's routine with enthusiasm.

When our lives are closely analyzed, what is "peace," or "happiness," but a continuous transmutation of our visible and invisible environments? If on the visible side our body is at rest, during a blissful period, there is a transmutation on the invisible. There, our emotions are at work, for when we are happy we are pouring them out towards those we love. Or our thoughts are busy creating a larger mental

edifice in which to live. Transmutation and happiness are inseparable.

Since the essence of true peace and happiness is an unceasing transformation, the first obvious thing we all need to learn is willingness to cooperate with the transmutation which life imposes on us. But usually we are unwilling, and hence most of our miseries. Because a particular grouping of mental and emotional states was the cause of yesterday's happiness, we insist that today's happiness must be composed of those same groups and of no other. When, as constantly happens, our yesterday's cause of happiness is absent today, we grieve, instead of looking to see into what new thing it has been transmuted. We are constantly missing happiness, not because it is not there, but because we will not look in the direction where it is waiting to greet us.

This mystery of transmutation becomes clearer if we recognize the complexity of our self. Most will admit—except materialists—that man is a duality of body and soul; some will go further and hold him to be a triplicity of body, soul and spirit; and some may go further still with the Theosophists and think of man as composed of seven "principles." Little matters how we think that man's spirit is related to his body —whether the soul is an invisible balloon hovering over his head, or that the seven principles of man are wrapt up like the coatings of an onion. But what

does matter is that life should be recognized as a process of transmutation of things to ideas, and of ideas to ideals.

The rich man is not happy because of his riches, but because of the ideas which he associates with his possessions. "My house, my fields, my motors"—thus he continually lives in his world of ideas. But his ideas, after their first day, slowly lose their flush of happiness unless he allows his ideas to transmute themselves. The wise rich man does so, and then his ideas slowly become related to some ideal of patronage or service. Then they group and re-group themselves continually, reflecting the many facets of the idea. But once again, unless he accepts each new grouping as it transmutes itself from simple to complex, from small to great, happiness will elude him. The mother wrapt in her babe is happy, for awhile; but if she is to continue in happiness, she must allow her tenderness towards her child to transform her imagination till her love is both strong and detached. The devotee of God will, in spite of his purity, tend to be a fanatic, if he will not allow his faith to transform itself to something larger and lovelier. Body must be transmuted to soul, and soul to spirit. We must mount from principle to principle, ever transmuting the lower into the higher. The root of our dissatisfaction lies in the fact that we will not go into the future with life's transmutations.

In what is a cultured man different from the uncultured, except in this cooperation with transmutation? Travel requires wealth, but not every traveled man is cultured; with a few books of travel a poor man may be more instructed than the traveler who has journeyed from country to country attracted only by what he is accustomed to, and repelled by the new and the strange. There is more music in a peasant girl singing light-heartedly in the field than in a *prima donna* who is envious and ambitious. For transmutation is at work in the former's character day by day, while the latter clings to her ideas of happiness and will not allow life to lead her through renunciation into transmutation.

What is the meaning of our education but to teach us the art of transmutation? What does the poet do for us, but show the delight of the process of transmutation of the particular to the general, the evanescent to the permanent? What is a great piece of architecture or sculpture but a transmutation of crude matter into substance which mystically lives and exhales beauty? What is a landscape but a transmutation of sky and earth into a window-frame through which to look into serenity and grandeur? What are our anguishes but the fires in which our self is softened to be hammered anew on the anvil of destiny into a shape of greater worth and beauty?

On all sides life is every transmuting. To him who discoveres this mystery of life, a flower, a cloud, a bird's call, tells of what the heart longs for. Dynamic life, flowing, changing, revealing, this is life's eternal transmutation. And in the midst of this flux we find the Archetype of it all—that wonder of bliss and beauty to which all men shall come when they put on the robe of glory.

> The One remains, the many change and pass.
> Heaven's light forever shines, earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragment. Die,
> If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
> Follow where all is fled!

It requires courage to follow life thus swiftly to the uttermost verge of a seeming nothing. But life gives the fulness of her joy only to the brave. That is where the soul's supreme test lies—to go forth into an unknown, accompanied only by life itself. Yet since all is Life—hopes and dreams, heartaches and joys, God Himself—and that Life is ourselves of the past, of the present and of the future, to "follow where all is fled" is to find that all. Such is the meaning of Transmutation.

THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION

Chapter VI

THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION

There is a famous passage in Plato to which Western philosophers often recur, because the idea in it is so haunting. Attempting to describe the relation between our world and the ideal world, Plato asks us to imagine a group of men sitting at the door of a cave; they are looking into the cave, but are so chained that they cannot turn their heads so as to look out of the cave. Imagine now there passes in front of the cave a procession which is so lit from one side that shadows of it are cast into the cave. The chained prisoners will see on the wall of the cave before their eyes, only the shadows of the people in the procession. The three-dimensional solidity of each figure, and its shape and colors, will all appear as a flat shadow of length and breadth only. The prisoners will never be able, unless they are extraordinarily trained in their imagination, to construct out of the shadows the solid forms of the procession.

To most of the prisoners all the shadows will be alike in texture; but one more thoughtful and observant that the rest may note that all the shadows are

not alike, that some are darker than others, and some of sharper outline here and there. These differences, noticeable only to him, will lead him to construct a three-dimensional idea of the objects of which the shadows are two-dimensional projections.

By this symbol of the cave, Plato tried to convey how all life in a phenomenal world, "our world" as we call it, is meaningless until we transcend it and see a Divine World of Ideas of which it is only a projection. But fascinating as such a theory is, the difficulty for us mortals is that reality is not a matter of philosophical labels but of material occurrences. When we are serene and content, we may possiby like to toy with the idea of a noumenal world of ideals; but when pains and penalties are our lot, philosophical ideas give us but very cold comfort.

Yet it is a matter of experience that the only comfort we find in life is from ideas. Even the comfort which a friend gives is largely through the idea we form of him. Not only is it true that as a man thinketh so he becomes, but also that as a man thinks so he creates his world and peoples it for his gain or loss. Sooner or later, life forces us to find our sole refuge in ideas.

There are two ideas which we hold to be true without the slightest possibility of doubt. They are our ideas of Time and Space. We do not believe merely on another's word that Time and Space exist, we know

it from direct experience, and often to our cost. When those we care for are absent, space is not an abstraction, but a thing that hurts. As the years pass one by one, and we grow to middle age and then to old age, we know what time is, a thing that wastes us away.

On all sides we are hedged in by time and space; far and near is our longitude, and past, present and future, our latitude. These lines at right angles to each other make for us a two-dimensional world; and we can no more think of living without our ideas of time and space than a figure drawn on a slate could think of itself as existing apart from the slate. We say to ourselves: "We are born, we mature, we die; we are born again and again, we mature and die. From life to life, we go onwards from what we are to something greater." Such is the current of our thinking.

But just as by direct experience we know that time and space are our boundaries, so too we can know by direct experience that time and space do *not* make our boundaries. This sounds a startling statement, but to it, to that realization, all life tends. Not that time and space are not realities, but they are "relative," in a way we little realize. The shadows on the wall of Plato's wall are real, but only relatively so, when compared with the true nature of the figures of the procession. Our nights and days pass, and to each of us there is a past, a present and a future. But such a time as ours, time that *moves,* is relative, for there is

an Event which is an Eternal Now, in which past, present, *and the future* are blended.

All the latest speculations of scientists like Einstein and Minkowsky are revealing to us that time and space are "relative." There is one kind of time and space, my time and my space, and another, time and space which is your time and your space. If you and I are traveling from Madras to Bombay by two successive mail trains, your present will be Madras while mine will be near Sholapur at the time you start. Madras is past time to me then. My present of Sholapur will be your future. As I travel, town after town drops behind me into a past; they await you still in the future. So it is with everything. Each of us has his time and his space.

But surely there are some kinds of time and space which are common to us all? Yes, say our modern scientists, but they exist in a "four-dimensional continuum." Our time and space are relative like the shadows of Plato's cave. We must go to another dimension still, to find the reality behind our time and our space.

If this is the truth (and our modern scientists assure us it is), then can we *go forward in time?* We know we can go backwards, so far as our memories are concerned. But can we now, at the present moment, realize what we shall be a thousand years hence?

Yes, if we can live in a "four-dimensional continu-

um." There are states of our being, call them by what names we will, which carry us out of ourselves into a future of glorious possibilities. Now and then, we get glimpses of ourselves in a future where we are not imperfect but perfect, not weak but strong, not struggling but having achieved. One soul is thus lifted for a while into his future by the powerful personality of a teacher or leader; another touches his future in some fine moment of his day-dreaming. We all can to some extent go into the future. But there is always unhappily for us, a return to the present. When so returning, we call the future which we have sensed a dream, a hallucination, something hoped for but never to become true.

A struggle is necessary in order to change our conceptions of time and space, if we are not to slip utterly back from our future. Just as the prisoners in Plato's cave might by some rebellion overpower their gaolers and win liberty, so we too have to overpower our gaolers, of whom the most domineering is the physical body. It is that body which says, "I am here, not there." But my emotional body can dominate this limitation by making me feel that I can be with the friend I love though he is not "here." The emotional body is a gaoler, for it says, "I was happy, but I am not now." The mental body must then come to our rescue and say, "As is the cause, so is the effect; deserve, and you will be happy again." In its turn, the

mind becomes the gaoler, saying, "All things pass, and I too shall decrease."

There is only one savior now. He is the Captain of our Salvation, he who is other than body and emotion and mind. To find him, we must go forward again and again into the future. It was he whom we saw in our highest moments. Once having seen him we must not deny him; we must try incessantly to see him.

Here Hope comes to our aid. For what is hope but a glimpse of the future?

> Despair was never yet so deep,
> In sinking as in seeming;
> Despair is hope just dropped asleep,
> For better chance of dreaming.

But for such better dreaming we must select from memory those times and occasions when we were on the mountain peaks, and saw visions of new realms before us. The love we were capable of once but seem incapable of now, the joy once felt of sacrifice which seems so unappealing now, the heroism in temptation which was once ours but which has now deserted us, all such memories of our past must be marshaled and made constantly to pass in review.

If we thus select the best of our past, with no conceit of mind but following an inward confidence, and

in spite of every doubt affirm, "These am I still," then the Captain of our Salvation, the future self of glory, suddenly descends annihilating time and space. With his descent, he brings the realization that all our best in the past and in the present are only partial glimpses of glories that are inevitable to be.

THE WINDOW-PANE

Chapter VII

THE WINDOW-PANE

An experience has happened to me a few times which always produced a profound effect upon me. It has been always in a city, on a day when there has been no gleam of sun. As towards dusk I walked along some street, I have been suddenly blinded by a beam of light. After the first start, I saw that a window-pane of some high house quite a distance away had caught through a break in the clouds some rays of the setting sun. Such was the angle of the sun's rays at that moment, that the sight was reflected by the window-pane to only one point, the one where I happened to be in a particular street at a particular moment. A minute later, the window-pane had ceased to be a mirror of the sun and reverted to its normal existence as a window-pane. But why did the gleam of the sun have such an effect upon me? Because that day my duties felt rather oppressive and there seemed to be no inspiration anywhere. The sun's rays breaking up the grey pall everywhere became for me for the time a road to another world.

Now, the sun was not planning to inspire me; the

window-pane reflecting the light had not me in mind. The sun shone according to its Dharma, and the pane reflected according to its. But I came in the pathway of the two as they performed their Dharmas, and an inspiration descended on to me through their agency. Perhaps another pedestrian, a second before me or after, was blinded at that same spot, but instead of seeing a road to another world, merely blasphemed because his eyes were blinded.

Just as the window-pane all unconsciously put one on the track of a path to the sun, so every object around is showing us a way to that wealth or reward of which the Veda sings. "O fire divine, lead us by a fair path to our reward; O God who knowest all our deeds, strip us from crooked evil! To Thee all hail oft and again we cry!" But not alone the sacred fire on the altar is that "fair path"; the dry sticks, the ghee, the stones of the altar, the metal of the sacrificial vessels, each caste worshiper present, each outcaste not allowed to be present, each is a "fair path," and reveals its inspiration. For each object which exists does so only in order to do a work. In so performing its Dharma, it becomes a mirror of the Hidden Light of life and joy in which all things live and move and have their being. Each particle of dust, each leaf of each weed, the dirty puddle as the clear pool, since each is busy at its Dharma, reveals a secret message.

How and when that message will flash none can know. That is one of life's wonders. In the most unexpected of places, and when we least look for it, suddenly it flashes, showering on us inspiration. Perhaps a child smiles, not at us, but on another. Yet that child's face, all unknown to him flashes the message of which we stand in need. It was a skylark which led Shelley on and on, from height to height of vision; it was a nightingale's song which made Keats feel that it was "rich to die." It was Pippa's singing as she passed which precipitated events she never dreamed of. Our human nature is almost a perfect mirror of the Hidden Light which drives men to genius or to madness. A World Savior mirrors the millions of little worlds of millions of people, and is a broad, broad way to our "reward"; a hero flashes strength and daring and makes out of humdrum folk the pioneers of a great age. Many a courtesan, all unaware of the catastrophic power of the Shakti which all women, good and bad alike, enshrine, has shattered strong men's characters to pieces. Many a maid or mother has been the cause of heroism and sacrifice in someone who saw the Shakti revealed in her, and for whom she never dreamed she had any message at all.

Religion is supposed to tell us that Light which "shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." If only religion told us of *all* the ways of its shining, how simple the path of holiness and duty

would be. But for us hapless mortals, life's complexities begin because that Light seems to shine in places which religion never mentions. Sometimes we find it was indeed that Light in those undreamed-of places; but sometimes, alas, we find only too late that it was only a will-o-the-wisp after all, and there is no comfort as we contemplate our undoing. Yet such is our human nature, with its spark of the Divine Fire which seeks its fellow, that we are unrepentant even though we suffer actually from our undoing.

> But this I know, whether the one true Light
> Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite—
> One glimpse of it within the Tavern caught
> Better than in the Temple lost outright.

It is this same truth which is put more exquisitely by Beatrice to Dante:

> Io veggio ben sì come già risplende
> Nello intelletto tuo l'eterna luce,
> Che vista sola sempre amore accende;
> Es'altra cosa vostro amor seduce,
> Non è se non di quella alcun vestigio,
> Mal conosciuto, che quivi traluce.

I know full well how there already shines within thy mind that Eternal Light, which seen but once ever kindles to love. And if any other thing lead astray thy loving, a remnant it is, and ill-understood, of that same Light which therethrough gleams.

Formal religion does great disservice to men in insisting so greatly that the spiritual sense can be found only in temples or churches. That is perhaps the reason why it is only when heretics abound that a religion really is thriving. One reason why Hinduism persists in spite of many elements in it which no longer help men, is that Hinduism has always tolerated heresy. Of course it has been laid down as a matter of good breeding that each heretic should, before beginning his heretical exposition, say formally, "I believe in the Veda." After this polite formula, a sop to the orthodox Cerberus, the heretic has been free to expound, and who so cared free to listen. The truly spiritual man is scarcely the product of his religious environment, but rather in spite of it. He needs must seek the Light and find it, elsewhere than where formal religion declares it can only be found. For spirituality is not a matter of the beliefs which a man professes, but of his openness to the secret message as to life which every object is ever ready to reveal to him.

So one great wonder in life, to him who can see and sense, is that every object everywhere is always flashing an ever new message. The Vedas are not only four, the Testaments two, the Pitakas three; as many particles of dust or pebbles, or drops of water, or blades or leaves there are, so many are the Vedas and Testaments and Pitakas. Like the window-pane, each object not only does its work, but flashes also a

message. For each object is dual, like the window-pane, whose main service is to let the light through, but which can also refuse to let the light through and so become a mirror. Each object when rightly viewed tells us what it is, as a small part in a great plan; but also, unknown to itself, it flashes to the beholder another message, the message of the Spirit.

The second great wonder in life, to him who aspires, is that in spite of all his weaknesses he can be a mirror of strength to another. His Dharma is to aspire to purity, to dispassion, to get rid of weakness; and in so fulfiling his duty, many a day he will despair because he goes backwards and not forwards. Yet such is his relation to the great Whole that, unknowing to himself, he will be flashing a message of strength to others. At those times when "there is no health in us," as the Prayer Book says, even at those very times we radiate strength to others. "He saves others, himself he cannot save." Well might the window-pane, comparing itself with all things of color around it, despair saying, "What good am I, a thing that cannot retain even one faint shade of the lovely colors from the Sun?" Yet the use *to others* of that pane lies in just that inability.

So a window-pane also can work with us at the common work of Gods and men—to reveal the Life of the Spirit.

THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR DAYS

Chapter VIII

THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR DAYS

There are two lines out of the four of Kipling's famous verse, which are omitted by nearly everyone who quotes them, though they contain the truth he intended to convey to the world.

But there is neither East nor West, border, nor breed, nor birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

When strong men stand face to face, there is indeed something akin to a blood-brotherhood, though they come from the ends of the earth. Their kinship is not of race or tradition, and not of religion, since they came from the East and the West. It is a new kind of kinship, that of Strength. But strength of what—of domination, unscrupulousness, or callousness? Many strong men, especially conquerors, are notorious for those qualities, but theirs is a spurious strength which divides conqueror from conqueror and man from man; it is not a strength which unites. The real strength of truly great men is derived from the work to which their souls are pledged.

Sooner or later, all men who refuse to live a life merely of the senses discover that there is one part of their nature which craves satisfaction through work. Our affections surround life with beauty, and our intellect with wisdom; but even the most loving and the most wise find life missing its mark until he discovers a work to do. For many men who are convinced there is a spiritual life, the great problem is where to find the soul's work in the midst of the labors necessary to sustain the body. The ordinary life of most men is how to "make both ends meet." What is earned and what must be spent, what one craves for and what Karma will give, these have to be continually adjusted day by day.

In the course of this adjustment, we commit ourselves to certain "professions." As teacher or lawyer, as *littérateur* or doctor, as engineer or publicist, and in other professions, men work for their bread and butter. It is noteworthy that, though the laborer too works for his bread and butter, he is not called a "professional man." For a professional man must start his career with some knowledge of the science of his profession; moreover he must know who are its "authorities," and also accept certain ethical principles as binding upon him.

It is this idealism, unhappily mostly theoretical nowadays in the professions, which distinguishes the mere "tradesman" from the professional man. Long

ago, in Greece, an idealism was accepted for the medical profession, and a famous oath was administered to all doctors at the commencement of their career. It was incumbent upon a doctor, for instance, when he saw signs of death appearing in a patient, to refrain from promising a cure. But Æsculapius, the son of Apollo, was prevailed by gold to undertake the cure of a rich man in whom the signs of death had begun, and Socrates approvingly mentions that a thunderbolt punished this impiety of the father of medicine. If the Gods were now to hurl thunderbolts on the professional men who betray the idealism in their profession, how rectitude, even if divinely enforced, would flourish?

It is curious that one most arduous career is never mentioned as a profession. It is that of the housewife. Yet we do not withhold the term profession from the prostitute. It is her "profession," we say. If a woman were to say proudly, "I am the manager of a household," most of us would smile at the novelty. Yet all other professions would be sadly out of tune if the housewives of the world were remiss in their profession.

To most professional men everywhere, in the East too as in the West, there is a distressing gap between the idealism in their profession and the idealism of their religion. Teachers and doctors, writers and artists (lawyers being excepted by universal consent),

are recognized as often living lives of sacrifice. These and workers in a few other professions, find something idealistic in their work for which they are willing to make sacrifices of higher salaries or fees. Such men, and in these days women too, find a satisfaction and not a grievance in what they renounce. But their religion has no message to their idealism as professional men or women. After a life of forty or fifty years as an idealist in a profession, what is there to look forward to beyond the grave? Only to reside in some heaven where the ability and idealism gained in their profession are not wanted. It would be worth while to be a great surgeon, if in heaven one could mend compound fractures of angels' wings; it would be a joy to look forward to, if one were a schoolmaster, if in heaven there could be classes of cherubs to train in the arts of the angels. Who would not toil as an engineer if, in the final beatitude of Moksha or Nirvana, one could build those "houses not made with hands," or build bridges of ether from star to star? But religion has no message to the professional man, and he must live in two worlds which are unbridged—his devotion to his God and his idealism for his profession.

The only way out of the difficulty is somehow to enlarge the framework of our days. To most of us who are born in such religions as teach Reincarnation, the idea of successive lives is familiar, even if we apply

it only incidentally in our conduct. But the belief at once enlarges the framework of our daily life. Are we engineers? Then, as new continents arise, and with them new races and civilizations, we shall be there to build cities, harness the waterfalls, and unlock the forces of the ether. And when we come to perfection as Jivanmuktas? Then we shall go from star to star organizing the perfect Universe. So too with every profession. As doctors, we shall heal not only physical bodies, but organize the life in invisible worlds also, till all astral bodies, mental bodies, buddhic bodies and Atmic vehicles are utterly perfect, so that the Divine Consciousness can function in every Monad with perfect freedom. Having been lawyers and justices on earth, we shall be such living embodiments of Eternal Justice that, by our mere presence, we shall teach all souls what Dharma is, whatever is the star we choose for our labors.

And for those who cannot believe in Reincarnation? The process is the same. They too must enlarge the framework of their days, and plan to work after death more ideally still, somewhere, somehow. It is the constant planning which is vital, for the life grows more with the planning of the new, than in the achievement of the already planned. Ever idealistic, ever conscientious, ever achieving success, and yet never satisfied—such is one element of the life of the Spirit. For the Spirit is not as a still lake which no

breath of wind ruffles; it is a Niagara of energy which pours through the human heart and brain. Nirvana is not a mere placid peace, but a generator whirling at such tremendous speed that it seems to the eye not to move at all.

When all is said and done, man's final happiness is in his work. Everything of happiness will fade, even after æons of bliss, but never the idealism in his work. All life must be attuned to that work, till, slightly changing the ancient doctrine of the Upanishads, "not for the sake of the wife is the wife dear, but for the sake of *the work* is the wife dear," and "not for the sake of the son is the son dear, but for the sake of *the work* is the son dear."

The framework of our days must not be Time but Eternity, and Eternity must not be imagined as an endless succession of lives, in Time, but the *absence* of Time. We must come to the "Eternal Now," as we contemplate our work, and feel coming from it unending inspiration and eternal joy.

Who shall teach us to find that work? None can teach another. That is one proof of the Divinity of the soul. Each must find for himself, and he will be led by many a false guide to what he will eventually find is not his true work. But sooner or later, he will find; and then he will know that his work is the only thing in him worth calling his "soul," and that the

idealism he finds in his work is the heart and being of Whomsoever or Whatsoever he has aspired to as his God or his Goal.

"NETI, NETI"

Chapter IX

"NETI, NETI"

There is one Sanskrit word which is recognized as summarizing the highest teaching of Hindu sages. It is Brahman, which signifies that one Existence, whose only characteristics knowable by us are Sat, Chit and Ananda—Existence, Intelligence and Bliss. To the "knower of Brahman," the mystery of existence is solved; there is no duality of God and non-God, good and evil, pleasure and pain, high and low; race and religion, culture and caste are to him merely labels which falsify the fundamental fact that there is one indivisible Life in all, "One without a second." The sage accepts every form of life as the One Life, inscrutable and inspiring. So powerful to transform everything is this realization of Brahman, that it was said of old, "if you were to tell this to a dry stick, it would put forth leaf and flower!"

The truth as to the unity of all life is, of course, not the discovery of Hindu sages alone. Every philosophical school which has existed, from ancient Atlantis down to modern days, has stated that great truth in one form or another. The forms necessarily vary.

The Platonic conception of Being, with its attributes of the Good, the True and the Beautiful is one form, while Christian philosophers with their teaching as to the Transcendence and Immanence of God give yet another. A fascinating form too is that of Lao-Tsze, with his teachings concerning the Tao, the "Way."

But there is a second word in Hindu philosophy which is less well known than Brahman, and which utters a truth not proclaimed in other philosophies. That word is *Neti*, which in reality is composed of two Sanskrit words *na-iti*, whose meaning is "Not so." Make any assertion you will, and its denial can be given with the words *na-iti*—"Not so." But the word Neti is used in Hindu philosophy for one stupendous conception, which is the climax of achievement of Hindu sages.

Briefly put, Neti signifies that, whatever assertion you make concerning the nature of God, the ultimate Reality, and however inspiring is your proclamation, it is *not* the truth. For whatever is proclaimable about the nature of that Reality is not the truth concerning it. To make more precise this thought, suppose a great Deva came and said that he knew God, and described His attributes, the Hindu sage aspiring to truth, would merely say "Neti, Neti—not so, not so," meaning that by no phenomenal attribute can the Reality be ever known. The sage would go even so far as to say "Neti, Neti," were even the Supreme Lord, Ishwara

Himself, to stand before him as the revealer of Reality. For nothing embodied can reveal the Reality; in no terms of the Manifested can the Unmanifest be known. It is, therefore, an axiom that whatever is *experienced* is only the realization of some attribute of the Reality, but not the Reality itself.

To every experience, however spiritual and transcendent, the sage must say "Neti, Neti." Where his search for Reality will end he does not know, but as he mounts from plane to plane, and seems to come nearer and nearer to the Center, he must ever say to each plane "Neti, Neti." For so long as there is something external to observe, what he observes cannot be the Reality.

This intransigency of the Hindu sage is foreign to Western philosophy. The highest which the West has achieved is undoubtedly the marvelous conception of Plato, which he puts into the mouth of Diotima the seeress who instructs Socrates concerning the nature of the One.

> He, then, who to this end would strive aright, must begin in youth to seek fair forms, and should learn first to love one fair form only, and therein to engender noble thoughts. And then he will perceive that the beauty of one fair form is to the beauty of another near akin; and that if it be Beauty's self he seeks, it were madness not to account the beauty of all forms as one same thing; and considering this, he will be the lover of all lovely shapes, and will abate his passion for one shape alone, despising and deeming it but a little thing.

And this will lead him on to see that the beauty of the soul is far more precious than any beauty of outward form, so that if he find a fair soul, though it be in a body which hath but little charm, he will be constant thereunto, and bring to birth such thoughts as teach and strengthen, till he lead on that soul to see the beauty of actions and of laws, how all beauty is in truth akin, and the body's beauty is but a little matter; and from actions he will lead him on to sciences, that he may see how sciences are fair; and looking on the abundance of beauty he may no longer be as the slave or bondman of one beauty or of one law; but setting sail into the ocean of beauty, and creating and beholding many fair and glorious thoughts and images in a philosophy without stint or stay, he may thus at last wax strong and grow and may perceive that there is one science only, the science of infinite beauty.

For he who hath thus far had intelligence of love, and hath beheld all fair things in order and aright—he drawing near to the end of things lovable shall behold a BEING marvelously fair; for whose sake in truth it is that all the previous labors have been undergone: One who is from everlasting, and neither is born nor perisheth, nor can wax nor wane, nor hath change or turning or alteration of foul and fair; nor can that beauty be imagined after the fashion of face or hands or bodily parts and members, nor in any form of speech or knowledge, nor as dwelling in aught but itself; neither in beast nor man nor earth nor heaven nor any other creature; but Beauty only and alone and separate and eternal, which, albeit all other fair things partake thereof and grow and perish, itself without change or increase or diminution endures for everlasting. And whoso being led on and upward by human loves begins to see that Beauty, he is not far, I say, from reaching the end of all.

In these wonderful words of Plato, we have the same teaching as that of the Upanishads. Revealing the One with the attributes of a Personal God, the Shvetashvatara Upanishad sings:

Him may we know the over-lord supreme of lords, the god supreme of gods, the king of kings, supreme of the supreme, lord of the universe, the God to be adored.

Thou woman dost become, and man, and youth, maid too in sooth; when old with staff thy steps thou dost support; thou takest birth with face on every side.

Blue fly, green bird, and red-eyed beast, the cloud that bears the lightning in its womb, the seasons, and the seas, beginningless, art thou. In omnipresent power thou has thy home, whence all the words are born.

The Hindu sage bows in reverence before the blue fly and the green bird, before the stone and the dog, and whispers to himself "Brahman!" But swift on the effect on him of that glorious truth, he mutters: "Neti, Neti," and passes on.

Is the teaching of Neti then a denial that truth can be found? Can the heart of man never come to rest? That is not what the teaching says. The sages promise rest, Eternal Rest. But they warn us against thinking that rest is where there is a Personal God. India would not be India if she stopped at the conception of a Personal God, however lofty. That is why the Vedanta proclaims that Ishvara, the Personal God of a created universe, is only an Emanation. Behind Him there is the Absolute from which He emanated. That too is why Buddhism completely ignores the problem of the nature of God. Hindu thought ever soars into the empyrean, till it seems to Western mystics to move in a cold nothingness where the soul is frozen into unconsciousness. Yet the greatest contri-

bution of India to the world's spiritual unfoldment is "Neti, Neti—not so, not so."

Neti is a hard saying, but it is the only staff which the pilgrim finds to lean upon in the end. Neti is what life teaches him. Wife and child, honor and fame, wisdom and work, these by turns hold him, and life for a while seems blessed. Then his own past, his own Karma, comes to teach by pain and by renunciation the lesson of Neti. Later comes that stage when "Guru is Brahmâ, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is Mahadeva, yea, Guru is Brahman itself." But life teaches him again to whisper "Neti, Neti," even while all that he is he owes to his Guru. Higher and higher he goes on from one emanation to another; "Neti, Neti" he still mutters. At the last stage but one, even before Ishvara Himself, and even while one with his Lord, he still must mutter "Neti, Neti."

Only when we stand alone, utterly stripped of all things of all planes, relying on none, not even on God, shall we glimpse the true nature of Reality. Little wonder then, that *Light on the Path* concludes with these three last rules to guide him who is "on the threshold of divinity":

> Hold fast to that which has neither substance nor existence.
> Listen only to the voice which is soundless.
> Look only on that which is invisible alike to the inner and to the outer sense.

So long as there are a few in this ancient land who will whisper "Neti, Neti," Indian life will not fundamentally change. And though they seem to stand aloof from the world, dwelling in forest hermitages or mountain caves, they give a unity and coherence to the world's dreams after peace and salvation. For salvation is from within, must be, since man and God are one, not two. The Way within, where ends the Way without, that is "Neti! Neti!"

THE POINT AND THE CIRCLE

Chapter X

THE POINT AND THE CIRCLE

What more perfect thing can the mind contemplate than the circle? The imagination sees sphere after sphere suggested by its circumference; the whole universe for the time is as it were held within that one endless line. Yet not less wonderful is the point. For what is a circle but an expanded center? Drop the circumference, leaving only the center and at will the circumference is called into being from the point which has neither length nor breadth. The point with its absence of all dimensions, and the three-dimensional sphere which issues from that point, are they not in a manner one and the same?

So I think are man and God. God is infinite, and our best symbol of Him is the universe. Man is finite, and when compared with God, there is no better symbol of man than the point. Yet if we know what the point is, the circle becomes known.

Hitherto we have all bent our gaze on the circle, because it is so beautiful, for when we looked at the point, it seemed insignificant and negligible. But thence issue all our puzzles. All because we center our gaze on the circumference, sometimes life seems

incomprehensible, and often we feel compelled to say that God's ways are not man's ways.

Shall we not now try to understand what is the nature of the center, and then reach out to the circumference? What mysteries does not man contain? All the sciences are but the alphabet of that perfect speech with which to describe man. Is not man himself every kingdom—mineral, vegetable, animal? Every cell of man's body contains all that the minerologist discovers of crystal formations. Every organ of man's frame summarizes the long history of plant and animal evolution. Do not the psychoanalysts tell us that all the ages, with their storm and stress, dwell somewhere today at the back of man's thoughts and feelings? A reel of film as mere film is but a valueless thing but place that film in the cinema projector, and life—joyous or sad, good or bad, but always thrilling—springs into being. So too is each man a miniature stage of all the world's great deeds and events, of the past and the present. All that is knowable leads first to man, though it leads to God afterwards.

Why do we turn from man to God? Is not man enough? When a human being likes us and becomes our friend, is not life pleasant because of him? And if he should love us, with the love of lover to beloved, do we not then touch deathlessness and unending glory, and become as God Himself for the time? Does not man suffice?

So many expect life to begin, in its true perfection, only in some far off future, beyond the grave, in some heaven. But a child's smile can open heaven's door, and God Himself is not nearer, when we are with our beloved and two universes blend into one.

What more glorious adventure is there than to find man? He is on all sides, yet he ever eludes. We hold him in our embrace, and think we have found him, and behold, it is only so much substance; he has slipped away and beckons to us from elsewhere. To find him is to lose him, for each finding only states his mystery with greater insistence. Yet each time we find him, how our heart sings for joy!

For what is man the point but God the circle? "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." But at that day when, as the heart panteth after the water brooks, man longs for man, then God is *here*.

This is Life, as some of us know it. To plan to toil with man, to be martyred with him, to sacrifice for him, this is enough for us, just because, past all thought, past all statement, incomprehensible and infinitely beautiful is God, and we have known Him also.

The point and the circle—the unit and the whole, the form and the life—hold us by turns, and both are heaven.

THE SECRET OF THE AGES

THE SECRET OF THE AGES

Chapter XI

THE SECRET OF THE AGES

Only when every form of duality ceases can the soul come to its greatest fulfilment. *"So Aham,"* "I am He," says the Hindu mystic, and tries with that affirmation to abolish the greatest duality in existence, that between man and God. *"Islam,"* "God's will be done," says the devout Muslim, as he tries to be one with the divine Will in all its manifestations.

All men instinctively seek unity. For man is one and the world he lives in is another. These two stand contrasted, now happily, now unhappily. As cause or as effect, man and his environment are continually related, either being by turns the forerunner of the other. Sometimes man, as cause, dictates what the effect—his physical, emotional and intellectual reactions to his environment—shall be. At other times, what he shall feel and think are forced on him by the molds into which his mind and emotions are cast by his character in his past lives. Night and day, our one and only problem is to make a truce with our environment, to be "one with God's will," or to "accept one's Karma." By different names we state the fundamental prob-

lem, that until we abolish duality there is no peace of heart, only brief rests by the wayside in a journey seemingly without end.

How shall that goal be reached, that final mode of existence, when every knot of heart is loosened, and, sure of ourselves, we look into eternity, serenely content with whatever eternity brings? Such a goal is the promise held out to us by the Great Teachers, the Peace of Nirvana, that fulness of Blessedness which bursts every conceptual form with which we attempt to define it.

One thing is certain about our goal. All the Teachers attest that it is not a negation, a vacuity, a glassy sea in which is no movement. Very poetical is the simile that "the dewdrop slips into the shining sea." But the use of the simile is only to suggest the union of the individual with all other individuals, not to suggest that after that unity is achieved its result is Zero, so far as the welfare of the universe is concerned. Why should we suppose that to "attain liberation" is to become negative, to vanish from the universe? Is there any single instance to show that energy can be annihilated? Energy must transform itself, from one mode of energy to another. Can an avalanche in motion suddenly lose its momentum and vanish into the air? Not in a world of natural law.

How then can we presume that, because a Mukta, a Perfected Soul, is "liberated," he has become nega-

tive? Can the energy of a mighty being like a Buddha—the Lord Gautama is ever described as *bala-viriya-samangî*, "endowed with strength and power" —suddenly become nothing because He "enters Nirvana?" Can the almost infinite compassion towards men of the Buddha Gautama, that mighty tenderness towards all that lives which was His sole motive for hundreds of lives of effort to come to Buddhahood, in order to show to men the Way to Blessedness, suddenly become nothing? There is no instance in the natural world of such a sudden cessation of energy; why should we presume that natural laws are utterly reversed in the supernatural world?

Nay, rather, energy must ever continue in its transformations. The Bliss in Brahman of each Mukta or liberated soul must somehow produce a change in the manifested universe. It is as the producer of great changes that the true consummation of the soul lies. That is indeed the turning point in man's evolution. When a man seeks to give to the universe a great gift, then the Path of Outgoing changes to the Path of Return. "What shall I give to my fellow-men? How shall I be the mirror of God? In what manner shall I transform the universe to a Universal Good?" When such questions are born in the soul, the illusions created by the self begin to fade, and the soul sees clearly. Then, and then only, does the soul hear the call of the Guru, "Come!"

Seek and ye shall find, is the ancient maxim. But the Guru, that Father in God who is destined for the soul from the beginning of time, is not found merely because the eyes see his face. How many in Palestine saw the living Christ and conspired to slay Him? There is only one way to find the Master, and that is by finding our work first. Knock at His door with the first fruits of our harvest of work, and He opens. That is the old, old law which is never broken. At the cry for help of heart or mind, He ever sends His comfort, but He will not open. But where service has been rendered, and the soul's cry is to give greater service still, then the door swings open to visions of service. But not necessarily to visions of the Master. If such visions are likely to be useful to the pupil, the Master will give them, but the decision rests with Him alone. But to greater visions of *work*, when there is the asking, the door is ever opened by the Master.

When the soul becomes one with its work, then the great Peace slowly begins. Thenceforth the soul is "saved"; he is safe for evermore from that heresy of the self which is the root of all misery. Then he "enters on the stream," whose tide shall carry him to the "other shore," where begins the blessedness of Nirvana.

If only we will look rightly into our own heart, and listen to the still, small voice there, we shall hear where our path lies and we shall always see visions

of our work. At the bottom of our nature we are unselfish and we hunger to give. Even when we are reckless in selfishness, the soul's cry at our depths is, "Let me find how to give." When with increasing will, heart and mind are used to subdue the fierce thirst for sensation, then inevitably vistas appear of a work. For soul and work are interchangeable terms, and the greater the work, the more spiritual the soul.

As statues in a gallery, there stand before the imagination archetype after archetype of what we may become. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavyladen, and I will give you rest"—thus shines in beauty the archetype of the Buddhas and the Christs. "Receive my strength and go forth to victory" flashes in splendor the archetype of the Manus. "Wisdom reacheth from one end of the world to the other; mightily and sweetly doth she order all things" sings in triumph the archetype of the Philosophers. "How beautiful upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" reveals in joy the archetype of the Artists. "In my devotion's flame be thou purged of sin" whispers the archetype of the Saints. Lawyer and saint, teacher and administrator, healer and artist, organizer and pioneer, these and many other types of workers exist in the World of Ideas as archetypes, those embodiments of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, in which the Divine Mind has willed to manifest itself in eternity.

When with trained imagination the soul broods over the story of its sorrows, and sees rising from their lurid flames the archetype of what it shall be, then naught remains but to be one with it, in happiness and in misery, in victory and in defeat. A new Rahasya or Secret of the Ages is thenceforth the soul's new World of Power—*Tat Karma, tad asmi*, "The Work, that am I." All experiences are, then, purposely hammered into tools for that Work. Even in life's torture-chamber, the worker's gaze is on his archetype, and with his dying breath he whispers and bears testimony, "The Work, that am I."

There is no final comfort in life except our work. Loving hands may give us joy and rest, but love's message is ever that we must gird ourselves for more strenuous toil. To him who has seen his archetype, no pain or disappointment can mar his enthusiasm, no heaven can entice him from its fulfilment. The two universes of soul and soul's environment begin to fuse into one as the worker becomes ever more worthy of his work.

When the soul can nevermore be turned away from its work, when soul and its work are one and not two, then the goal is achieved. That is the last work of the Master for his disciple. The aspirant and the Path must become one, says an ancient manual. It is to that union that life presses all. But how bright the Path, how exhilarating even its dangers, when the soul

has seen its archetype and vowed the vow, "That am I." Such a soul needs a guide no longer, nor even a God to worship, other than its Work. Who dares to be thus quit of priests and books, one with his Work, such a soul alone comes to Liberation.

THE JOY OF THE RETURN

Chapter XII

THE JOY OF THE RETURN

There comes a time in the soul's evolution when all experiences blend into one supreme experience, that he is returning to That whence he came. In his many past lives, he but partially knew that mysterious Something towards which he ever turned as his sole solace and comfort. Sometimes it was to him his God, his Master, his Lord, known by him by many names life after life; sometimes it was his Ideal, the betrayal of which was the supreme sin without forgiveness. But in all his long past he looked upon his God or his Ideal as separate from him, above him, beyond him.

But all things change when slowly there dawns on him that all he has prized as himself—his convictions, his truth, his worship of God, his love of man, his flame of aspiration to be perfect and holy—are not his at all. He has for so long thought of himself as his "individuality" composed of his thoughts and feelings, of his hopes and dreams, that it is at first impossible for him to realize that these things are neither he nor his acquirements nor his possessions. But after the first intellectual wonder regarding his non-existence, there comes to him then the inexpressible joy of grasp-

ing with his heart and mind, with every particle of every one of his vehicles, that all his hopes and dreams, his virtues and his aspirations are but streams pouring through him, coming from a Source which he cannot grasp, but going to an End which he can love and worship.

From this moment, his "I" is dead, nay more, remains scarce even a graspable memory. For one sole thing dominates him night and day; he knows beyond question that when he is at his highest, that highest in him is but an upward stream rushing through him in joyous offering. His worship of God with the most intense rapture becomes then only God's own rapture returning to Him; all his offering of love and devotion to man as man or to man as God thenceforth become to him joyous streams which sweep him on and on—not his streams but the streams of THAT called out from every atom of his being. How lovely it is then to lose all "individuality"— to know only the joy of the streams as they flow upward, and never be capable even once of the thought of an "I" who feels the wonder and delight of it all.

When the soul comes to this destruction of the "I," then begins a wonderful symphony. For thenceforth all the forces of the universe, which issued once from THAT, begin one by one to return to THAT through him. This mystery of the returning streams is in all things; the mineral which is on the downward arc of

life is ever dreaming of the joys of return; every blade and leaf, every bird and beast dimly dreams of the stage of return. The universe which came forth from THAT has ever as its driving force a power which makes it change from good to better, from better to best, steadily returning to THAT whence it came. Every kingdom of life knows this mystery of return, though the life forces in each kingdom are cribbed, cabined and confined, and must patiently wait the day when the path begins for the return.

So when the soul begins his return, then all things begin to feel the commencement of their return also. The mountain ranges whisper, "Brother, take us with you"; the clouds gaze on him saying, "Take us, take us." Each dumb beast, each sinner among men, all despairing souls, feel in his presence the joy of the return, and sense for a while an alleviation of their miseries, and find solace in renewed strength to hope and dream.

Then the world's contumely has no meaning; his own bruised and bleeding feet do not matter; even his anguish and despair, as he falls temporarily back into the self and its "I-ness," cannot dim the memories of that life once lived without the "I." All meanings then blend into one meaning—"This returns to THAT." All acts become one act—to gaze on and on at the Light, till the eyes are blinded, and yet laugh and love, rejoice and praise, and glory in the blinding.